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ABSTRACT

Two trends have become issues for school management in recent years. One is that educational leadership is becoming increasingly a more complex and difficult job to carry out and the other is that an increasing number of people with little administrative experience are moving into educational roles. The implementation of local, school district-sponsored mentoring programs assists both experienced and beginning school leaders. During the past 4 years, staff from the Center for Educational Leadership at the University of Northern Colorado have been working with school systems across the nation in developing these mentor programs. A training model has been developed that consists of five domains related to the implementation of effective local mentor programs. These domains are: (1) orientation to mentoring; (2) instructional leadership; (3) human relations skills; (4) mentor process skills; and (5) local implementation issues. The paper concludes with the implications for Colorado school districts. (RR)

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MENTORING PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT BEGINNING SCHOOL LEADERS

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MENTORING PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT BEGINNING SCHOOL LEADERS

In recent years, two important trends have emerged as they are related to educational leadership. Both have tremendous implications for local school boards in search of ways to promote more effective administrative practices that lead to improved student outcomes. One trend is that, while educational leadership is increasingly recognized as a key ingredient to effective schools, it is increasingly becoming a more complex and difficult job to carry out. Secondly, there is great turnover currently taking place in the role of school principalships and superintendecies; an increasing number of people with little administrative experience are moving into important educational roles.

During the past few years, many school districts have found that a way to address both of these issues--the increasing frustrations felt by experienced school administrators along with the need to provide special assistance for beginners--might be addressed with a single strategy to assist the professional development of educational leaders. That strategy is the implementation of local, school district-sponsored mentoring programs. These are programs

which are designed to match one administrator with a peer who has special skills in assisting his or her colleague to function more effectively on an ongoing basis. During the past four years, staff from the Center for Educational Leadership at the University of Northern Colorado have been engaged in working with school systems across the nation in developing mentor programs to assist both experienced and beginning school leaders. In addition to sharing the basic concept of administrator mentoring, UNC staff have developed a training model which is used to assist local school district decision makers provide for the development of skills and practices to be used by school leaders who will serve as mentors to their peers.

The Training Model

Our training model consists of five domains related to the implementation of effective local mentor programs:

Domain 1: Orientation to Mentoring: This part of training is devoted to helping groups develop a solid understanding of some of the basic definitions and key features of effective mentoring relationships. Benefits that are reported by mentors, proteges (people who are mentored), and school systems are identified. One critical issue that is emphasized is the fact that effective mentoring programs are designed as ways to help people succeed as leaders, and not as

ways to evaluate or "weed out" ineffective beginning administrators.

Domain 2: Instructional Leadership: Here, the goal of the training is to provide mentors with some understanding of the latest research which has identified the most important characteristics of school leaders which promote more effective student learning in our nation's elementary, middle, and secondary schools.

Domain 3: Human Relations Skills: The most important part of mentoring involves one-to-one contact between two individuals. As a result, this training domain features the development of skills, knowledge, and sensitivities designed to help people appreciate the special learning needs of adults, differences in learning styles, and how to appreciate alternative personality types.

Domain 4: Mentor Process Skills: The daily work of mentors involves a good deal of skill in conferencing others, observing behaviors, and working toward effective problem solving. These are the central issues covered in this training domain.

Domain 5: Local Implementation Issues: Every situation where a mentoring program is implemented will be somewhat different from all other situations. Therefore, the training model suggests that a number of issues must be addressed

independently at the local site level. A single set of "correct" answers regarding how mentoring programs are to be developed in each district is not possible.

Implications for Colorado School Districts

The development of mentoring programs for school administrators in Colorado is a particularly important issue at present. First, recent political developments make it clear that the responsibilities of educational leaders are becoming increasingly difficult and complex. Demands for creative responses to extremely complicated problems and issues face all school administrators who must face the task of doing more and more with less and less. Having the support of and guidance of another leader in the form of a mentoring relationship might make such roles less frustrating.

Second, the state of Colorado is about to implement new legislation regarding the licensure of school administrators. By 1994, it will be necessary for newly hired administrators to receive an induction program designed by local school districts to provide support during the begining years of an individual's career, and also serve as a way to assess the competence of an individual's performance when he or she is first hired as a principal, assistant principal, or superintendent. A big part of this type of entry program for administrators will be the opportunity for school systems to assign more experienced

individuals to serve as ongoing mentors to less-experienced colleagues. This assignment will work only if those who are to be mentors receive sufficient support and training in their responsibilities so that they can be most effective to other administrators.

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